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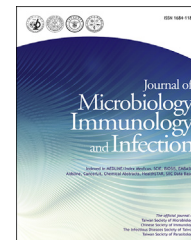
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Correspondence

The preventive strategies of COVID-19 pandemic in Saudi Arabia



KEYWORDS

COVID-19;
Saudi Arabia;
Coronavirus;
Preventive strategies;
Economic growth

Dear Editor,

Undoubtedly, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is causing global health, economic and social crisis.¹ The COVID-19 is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARSCoV-2). The virus was first reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province (China) on December 13, 2019. Globally, as of July 25 (2:18pm CEST), 2020, there have been 15,581,009 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 635,173 deaths.²

In Saudi Arabia, the first confirmed case was reported on March 2, 2020. From Mar 2 to July 25 (2:18pm CEST) 2020, there have been 262,772 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 2672 deaths.^{2,3} The current population of Saudi Arabia is 34,846,648 (0.45% of the total world population) according to Worldometer. There are 13 administrative areas of Saudi Arabia: Riyadh, Makkah, Madinah, Qassim, Eastern Region, Asir, Tabouk, Hail, Northern Border, Jazan, Najran, Al-Baaha, and Al-Jowf. Four major cities are having 28% of total population: Riyadh (4,205,961), Jeddah (2,867,446), Makkah (1,323,624), and Madinah (1,300,000).

After the first infected cases, the government was very proactive in preventing the COVID-19, for instance, a range of measures were implemented: Border measures: travel restrictions (including on international flights and internal public transportation and taxis); and Lockdown and Curfews (suspending prayers at mosques; closing all schools, universities, and shopping malls; suspending employee attendance at government and private workplaces (with the except for critical staff); and increasing testing). Within

the week of the first case confirmation, the lockdown started in March 9, 2020. A partial curfew (Curfew started for 21 days: 6am –7 pm) on March 23, 2020; Later, a 24-h curfew in Riyadh, Dammam, Tabuk, Dahrnan, Hafuf, Jeddah, Taif, Qatif, Khobar on April 6, 2020. During the five-day Eid Al-Fitr holiday, the authority further imposed the 24-h curfew across the Kingdom on May 23, 2020.⁴

Before the identified cases of COVID-19, the authority proactively suspended the entry of travellers holding a religious visitor visa and the entry of tourists from countries with COVID19 on February 27, 2020. The Umrah suspension was imposed on March 4, 2020. The Ministry of Hajj in early April called on countries to delay their bookings for the 2020 Hajj season. Further, early in April, the Ministry of Hajj called on countries to delay their bookings for the 2020 Hajj season. Saudi Arabia is successful in limiting transmission with the decision of early restrictions of access to its holy sites.

Importantly, the expatriates (Non-Saudi) represents approximately 30.82% (10.74 million) of total population of Saudi Arabia. Fig. 1 shows that the daily new confirmed cases (%) was higher till June 3, 2020. As of June 20, the Saudi national percentage was 60% comparing to Non-Saudi with 40%.⁵ The government announced strict company guidelines including temporary housing accommodation for expatriate workers to control the spread of COVID-19 and on April 22 a repatriation program ("Auda" or return) was launched to facilitate the return of expatriates.

In conclusion, while the significant risk remains that asymptomatic evacuees may transmit the disease, the stringent measures still be implemented based on the evaluation of the circumstances. The insights on prevention strategies by the Saudi government would be valuable information for tackling the COVID-19 or other similar pandemic in other countries.

Ethical approval

Not required.

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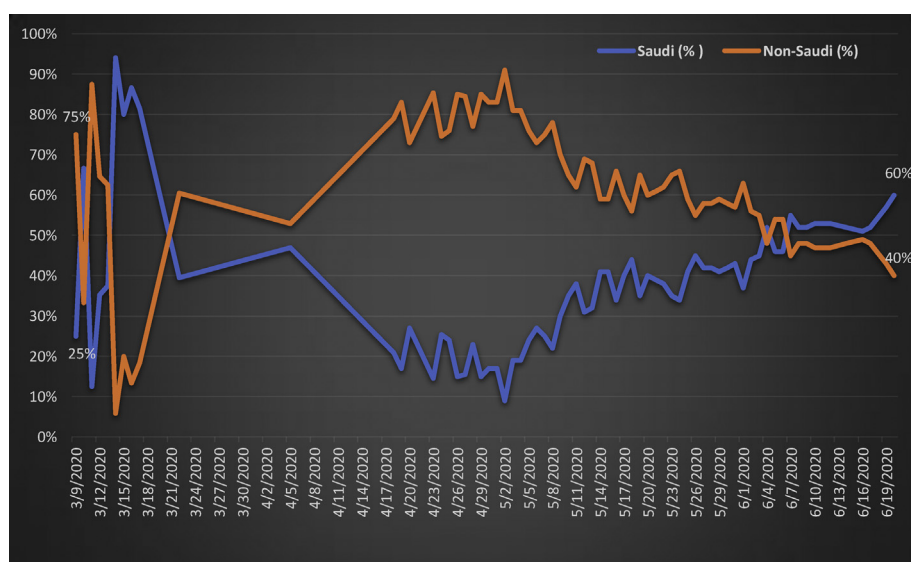


Figure 1. Percentage of Daily Confirmed New Cases (Saudi Vs. Non-Saudi). Source: Author's compilation.

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Author contributions

MN collected data, prepared and revised the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest

There is no competing interest.

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